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POSSIBLE NORTH VIETNAMESE CALL FOR A CEASE-FIRE

Hanoi's Best Case

1. If the North Vietnamese call for a cease-fire, we must assume that they will do so in the best circumstances they can possibly achieve and in terms best calculated to serve their ultimate interests. Therefore if we are to anticipate such a call in the near future we must assume that they will make a maximum effort between now and that time to improve their position militarily, politically, and psychologically.

2. In relationship to their current offensive we can speculate that they would like to occupy the city of Hue and the provincial towns of Quang Tri, Kontum, Pleiku, and An Loc before calling for a cease-fire. We can also assume that they would like to have demonstrated their capability of chewing up as many main force units of the South Vietnamese armed forces as they can, and perhaps achieving one or two spectaculars against the United States such as shooting down a B-52 or sinking an American naval unit.

3. If they can achieve all these objectives before calling for a cease-fire we can anticipate that the

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terms for such a cease-fire would be very steep. They would probably involve a minimum of supervision, at best a reactivation of the currently-composed ICC. They would also presumably be couched in the context of additional demands which would involve the following:

(a) Stipulated withdrawal of all United States forces within a fixed period of time.

(b) Dismissal of President Thieu from the Government of South Viet-Nam.

(c) Resumption of negotiations in the Paris framework on a regular weekly basis.

4. On the other hand, in order to make a cessation of hostilities the most appealing aspect of their initiative, they would probably be willing to propose a rather sweeping sort of cease-fire in place which would literally entail the suspension of all hostile activity initiated by their side. They would accompany this aspect of the call by internationally orchestrated appeals to the humanitarian aspects of their proposal and would have the entire enterprise set forward as a move sponsored by the PRG rather than by Hanoi itself.

Hanoi's Worst Case

5. If the North Vietnamese are unable to achieve

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any of their major military objectives or if, for example, they can achieve only a tenuous hold on one provincial capital such as Kontum, we can expect the nature of their call for a cease-fire to be somewhat different. It would probably be far less precise than in their best case and would be phrased in such fashion as to provide the optimum opportunity for them to renege upon it should the opportunities warrant. Their purpose in these circumstances would be to make the cease-fire proposal irresistibly appealing to Washington and digestible to Saigon. They would, in this supposition, be interested in having the cease-fire in order to provide themselves a respite from battle without necessarily sacrificing anything they had gained.

6. Consequently we could expect that such a cease-fire would have very few additional strings of the type which might be attached to their best case. There would, for example, be no insistence upon United States performance on troop withdrawals, President Thieu's resignation, or stringent ground rules for the Paris talks. Instead we could expect a simple request for the resumption of negotiations, perhaps conveyed

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privately in order to lend it additional credibility.

U.S. Attitude

7. Whatever the domestic and international political pressures might be, the United States would find it very difficult in terms of its foreign policy position, to accept a cease-fire under the stipulations contained in Hanoi's best case. The circumstances surrounding such a case and the accompanying demands would be viewed as the equivalent of an American surrender to North Vietnamese military victories, as well as diplomatic successes. Acceptance of such terms would be seen by the North Vietnamese and their allies as a sure sign of the willingness of the United States to crumble militarily and diplomatically to an ultimate acceptance of Hanoi's basic terms in this lengthy confrontation. In Saigon such an acceptance by the United States would be considered disastrous and would lead rapidly toward panic.

8. Acceptance by the United States in Hanoi's worst case would be considerably easier. It would be seen internationally and domestically as an indication that Hanoi was ready to throw in the towel. Despite the fact that it would result in the retention of

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considerable North Vietnamese forces on South Vietnamese soil, it would be seen in Saigon as a confirmation of North Vietnamese defeat and as a conviction that the "decisive battle" had been won. Although international opinion could be confused and obfuscated by an imaginative communist propaganda line, there would presumably be a general recognition among sophisticated observers that the North Vietnamese had gambled and lost in their invasion attempt.

9. Precisely because of these rather euphoric possibilities, there might be temptations, especially in Saigon, to reject the cease-fire proposal in the hope of total victory, or to append conditions which would improve the US/Saigon position prior to acceptance of Hanoi's terms. It might therefore be useful to examine the sort of conditions which Washington and Saigon might wish to attach to any cease-fire proposal which is put forward by the other side in the near future under circumstances equivalent to Hanoi's worst case.

10. In previous interdepartmental studies of this problem we have concluded that the sort of cease-fire most acceptable to us would be based on the following general terms:

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(a) All forces in South Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia will, on an agreed date, cease firing and remain in place.

(b) The cease-fire will encompass all hostile actions by main and local forces of both sides, including bombing, terrorism and other paramilitary activities. Reprisals and other acts of coercion will also be prohibited.

(c) During the cease-fire there will be no movement of main or local forces except for (1) defensive activity including patrols within specified zones close to the locations of these forces, and (2) withdrawals of US forces as agreed upon.

(d) There will be no augmentation of personnel or supplies beyond replacement levels; nor will there be any construction or improvement of military installations beyond maintenance levels.

(e) Population resettlement will be prohibited pending final settlement, except as agreed to by the negotiating parties subsequent to cease-fire implementation.

(f) The cease-fire will be monitored by

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(1) a new international supervisory body, and  
(2) a joint commission of the belligerents. The ISB will be staffed by personnel from countries mutually agreed upon by the parties in the dispute; it will be sufficiently large to (1) monitor principal points through which personnel/supplies enter the cease-fire area, and (2) investigate cease-fire violations reported to it. The DMZ will be re-established as a demilitarized zone under ISB supervision.

(g) Unilateral air/sea reconnaissance will be continued in the cease-fire area pending effective operation of the ISB.

11. At the same time we would expect such a cease-fire to be followed by immediate steps to convene talks involving all the Indochinese parties. We would expect one of the agreed purposes of these talks to be the early release of all prisoners of war. We would insist that the earlier North Vietnamese agreement to deal with the current South Vietnamese government be realistically implemented and that political discussions take place between that government and the communist authorities. Similarly we would seek the initiation of political discussions among Lao and Cambodian authorities. Finally,

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we would indicate that a premise of the international talks would be the agreed withdrawal of all external forces from the territories of South Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia.

12. It is clear that a total insistence upon these several conditions prior to the acceptance of a cease-fire would be unrealistic. They would in effect amount to the same sort of capitulation which Hanoi might be expected to demand of our side in their best case. However they do establish the bargaining parameters from which we should work in approaching the putative proposal from Hanoi.

#### The Saigon Position

13. Even if the North Vietnamese issue their cease-fire call without having captured any provincial capitals, they would still pose a problem for Saigon because of their nine divisions currently on South Vietnamese soil. The military consequences of this are being examined in a separate paper. The political aspects of it will be touched upon briefly in the next few paragraphs.

14. It is our estimate that President Thieu, given the circumstances we posit, would feel several

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compulsions to accept the cease-fire even though reluctantly. In the first place he would realize that a cease-fire call from Hanoi in such circumstances would constitute an admission of failure on their part and would be generally viewed as the result of a successful defense conducted primarily by RVN forces. Secondly, he would realize that a cease-fire called for in such circumstances would have enormous appeal to the United States and internationally. Moreover, in his own war-weary nation, he would find an overwhelming majority of the people favoring a cease-fire, even though some of his more ardent hawks might wish to finish the military job by expelling all North Vietnamese forces physically from South Vietnamese territory.

15. In this situation we would expect President Thieu to indicate to us privately that he is prepared to agree in principle to a cease-fire but to seek through negotiations to achieve the maximum advantage in the terms surrounding such acceptance. He would therefore press us, as the principal negotiating partner, to attach as many as possible of the conditions laid out in paragraphs 10 and 11 above. We can anticipate, in effect, having to engage in negotiations

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with both Saigon and Hanoi before we would take a firm and binding position with respect to a cease-fire call from Hanoi.

Public Posture

16. If a cease-fire proposal from Hanoi comes to us either directly or indirectly in private channels, we will presumably have adequate opportunity to conduct negotiations with both Saigon and Hanoi, exploring the degree to which we can shape the terms of a cease-fire to meet our own preferences. If, on the other hand, the call comes in a public declaration from Hanoi designed to exert maximum domestic and international political pressure upon us for its acceptance, we should be prepared with an immediate, palpable response which we can make publicly in a manner designed to be forthcoming but firmly insistent upon acceptable cease-fire terms. If the premises of this paper and the parallel military paper are compatible and if they are considered acceptable, it is recommended that we prepare a contingency statement for possible public use to respond to a North Vietnamese cease-fire call.

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